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Time firm remains in pollution woods

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The Eastex, Inc., paper mill near Silsbee, certainly no paragon of pollution control in years past, has improved markedly in the past year but is still not entirely out of those East Texas woods.

This is the picture of Eastex's pollution performance as reflected by the records of the Texas Water Quality Board and Texas Air Control Board, and by comments from officials of the two state agencies.

The record of Eastex, owned by Time, Inc., could be an indicator of what lies ahead on a much larger scale for Southeast Texas if Time absorbs Temple Industries as planned.

Hugh C. Yantis, Jr., water board executive director, evaluated Eastex this way:

"We used to receive many, many pollution complaints about them. But since about two years ago, we have had few or no complaints. They are now putting out a much better effluent than formerly, but I would say they are not yet satisfactory. They have some residual problems."

Pamela Giblin, chief attorney for the air board, said:

"We've been pressuring them on their air pollution problems, and I think they are coming around now. Their management seems much more receptive now, but we still have them under continuing surveillance."

Some items from the files of the two pollution agencies:

• Air board investigators referred Eastex to the board's legal staff in March, 1972, for "appropriate action."

• An air board staff memo dated Jan. 9, 1973, said sampling in July and September, 1972, showed particulate violations from three plant sources. "In summary," the memo said, "it is apparent the company has continued to operate in non-compliance since initial stack sampling in June, 1971."

• A water board summary and analysis in December, 1971, said Eastex's effluent quality had been "poor and frequently non-compliant for several years," but a pollution abatement project had brought some improvement.

• Self-reports by Eastex on its own discharge reflect compliance throughout 1972 on all its permit limits, except for high biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) in December. This was blamed on a plant upset.

The water board in January, 1972, amended Eastex's permit. Its proposed amendments were criticized as inadequate by the Jefferson County Environmental Control Department,

the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and a citizen group called Clean Air & Water, Inc.

One curious thing about the new permit:

Eastex, under its old permit, frequently violated its limit on chemical oxygen demand (COD). The amended permit dropped the COD requirement, but added a new one on total organic carbon (TOC).

However, the water board in its own inspections does not ordinarily run tests for TOC, and Eastex has been submitting no TOC readings in its self-reports.

Eastex still is submitting COD readings, though, and these in 1972 were still as much as double what they were supposed to be under the old permit.

Yantis said he added the TOC regulation and dropped the COD, at Eastex's request, because the TOC test is more informative and reliable, quicker and cheaper. It was not, he said, a move to get Eastex off the hook on its non-compliant COD levels.

Wayne Robinson, Eastex environmental control director, said the plant in fact has been testing its TOC output, and these readings were well below permit limits throughout 1972. He said the results had not been supplied to the water board because there is no space for them on the self-reporting forms.

He said the TOC results in the future will be added onto the self-reports.

Robinson said Eastex is making good progress on pollution and by the end of 1973 will have in place air and water pollution control equipment worth \$10 million in replacement value.

Another Eastex official, vice president Ollie R. Crawford, displayed his faith in the plant's pollution controls in a bizarre incident on April 7, 1970.

Before television cameras, Crawford accepted a newsman's dare and drank a beaker of Eastex effluent which included treated sewage from the plant. Crawford showed no visible ill effects.